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By J.D. Sumner
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ALBANY - An influx of imported Chinese tires may have lead to the closure of Cooper Tire and Rubber Co.'s Albany plant and the loss of 1,400 jobs, according to the testimony of U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop, D-Albany, before the U.S. International Trade Commission Wednesday.

Bishop is lobbying for sanctions against the Chinese to help protect domestic manufacturing who he says is suffering.

"The flood of tire imports over the last five years has been remarkable," Bishop said. "It is no surprise then that there has been a steep decline in domestic production. The Chinese imports drove down our share of our own market which has resulted in layoffs, reduced capacity, and plant closings."

Specifically, Bishop pointed to the decision to close Albany's Cooper Tire and Rubber plant at the cost of roughly 1,400 jobs.

"The Cooper Tire company has helped contribute to Albany's growth and prosperity by providing good jobs at good wages," Bishop said. "With the economic troubles now gripping Georgia, our country, and much of the world, it was a real setback to the hardworking citizens of Albany when the closing of the Cooper facility was announced."

Bishop was asked to speak by the United Steel Workers who are mounting a campaign aimed at reducing the importation of goods that undermine American markets.

Bishop, who sits on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, said that threats from importers, especially those who bring over what he says is cheaply made steel and rubber, could put quality American manufacturers who supply military contractors materials, out of business.

"It wouldn't be a good idea for us to be building our battleships with steel imported from other countries," Bishop said. "You can see where that would not be wise."

The ITC voted May 22 to allow for further investigation of the Chinese imports.

"There is a reasonable indication that a U.S. industry is threatened with material injury by reason of imports of oil country tubular goods from China that are allegedly subsidized and sold

in the United States at less than fair value," according to the ITC's announcement about the vote.